

Chapter 33: The Victory of Jesus

John 16:16–33

Throughout the Upper Room Discourse, Jesus has moved between comforting the disciples in their sorrow and encouraging them in the hope of his soon-to-be finished work and the coming of the Holy Spirit. In John 14, Jesus both promises that he is going away from them to prepare a place for them in his Father's house (John 14:2–3) and also addresses their concerns about being left as orphans (John 14:18) with troubled hearts (John 14:27). Then, John 15:1–17, Jesus beautifully described how the disciples would be his branches so that he, the vine, would produce abiding fruit in them. Afterward, Jesus abruptly transitioned to warning them that they would face the full brunt of the hatred of the world (John 15:18–25). Next, Jesus encouraged them with the hope of the coming Holy Spirit (John 15:26–27), and then he immediately returned to the subject of the hatred of the world (John 16:1–4a).

In the immediately preceding passage, Jesus encouraged the disciples through a glorious description of the ministry of the Holy Spirit as a floodlight to glorify Jesus and as the Treasurer of the Trinity (John 16:4b–15). According to the pattern, it should perhaps not surprise us that after a word of encouragement, Jesus now again forces his disciples to face the brutal facts: Jesus will go away, and they will not see him any longer in the way in which they have grown accustomed. Jesus does not shy away from the truth that this coming departure will be bitterly sorrowful for the disciples, even as the watching world rejoices to rid themselves of Jesus. Nevertheless, Jesus promises this comforting word to his disciples: *Jesus brings forth joy out of the sorrow of the cross.*

The Cross Will Not be in Vain (John 16:16–22)

While Jesus has more to speak in the presence of his disciples in John 17, he will not directly teach them. Instead, Jesus will then only pray in their hearing. This last section of John 16, then, is the final section of Jesus' teaching ministry to his disciples before going to the cross. Jesus knows that his disciples are struggling, with their hearts in turmoil. Nevertheless, Jesus begins this final section with a word that confuses his disciples, rather than immediately comforting them: "A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me" (John 16:16). This last section echoes what Jesus said at the beginning of the Upper Room Discourse in John 14:19: "Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me." Jesus began the Discourse by confronting his disciples with the hard reality of his looming departure, and now he closes on this same theme.

What, then, does Jesus mean by these cryptic statements? What do the two periods of "a little while" signify? Also, what does it mean that the disciples will *not* see Jesus any longer, but then that they *will* see Jesus? Furthermore, when we compare John 16:16 with John 14:19, why is it that the *world* will no longer see Jesus at all? These questions are so crucial that John goes out of his way over

three verses to capture the confusion of the disciples as they ponder what Jesus might mean:

So some of his disciples said to one another, “What is this that he says to us, ‘A little while, and you will not see me, and again a little while, and you will see me’; and, ‘because I am going to the Father?’” So they were saying, “What does he mean by ‘a little while’? We do not know what he is talking about.” Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him, so he said to them, “Is this what you are asking yourselves, what I meant by saying, ‘A little while and you will not see me, and again a little while and you will see me?’” (John 16:17–19)

John has recorded other scenes where the people debate what Jesus may have meant by something he has done or said (John 6:60; 7:10–13, 25–27, 31, 40–52; 9:8–34; 10:41; 11:45–57; 12:15–19). This scene is unique, though, for the disciples are alone in the same room as Jesus as they try to understand what their Master is telling them. You can almost see them whispering to one another, “What did he say? Did I hear that right? What does that mean?”

A Little While

The first period of “a little while” almost certainly refers to Jesus’ impending crucifixion. “A little while, and you will see me no longer” refers to the fact that Jesus is about to be crucified, to die, and to be buried. Indeed, the shadow of the crucifixion hangs over the entire Upper Room Discourse. Jesus has urged his disciples to let their hearts be troubled no longer (John 14:1), to cling to the promise that he will not leave them as orphans (John 14:15–16), to prepare for the coming hatred of the world (John 15:18–16:4a), and to wait for the Holy Spirit to equip them (John 16:4b–15). Jesus speaks all these final words to prepare his disciples for the fact that he will indeed disappear from their sight—that is, from their bodily presence—when he dies.

And yet, Jesus also gives his disciples hope that his death will not be the end of his interaction with his disciples: “and again a little while, and you will see me.” The world will no longer see Jesus (John 14:19), but Jesus promises that the disciples will see Jesus again. Interpreters have largely taken two views to understand what Jesus means by seeing Jesus “again.” Some take this to be a reference to Jesus’ resurrection, when Jesus appears bodily to his disciples on several different occasions (John 20:19–23, 26–29; 21:1–23) before ascending to his Father.² Others interpret this statement as a reference to the way in which the disciples will “see” Jesus through the eyes of faith and the presence of the Holy Spirit: “Nor ought we to think it strange when he says that he is seen, when he dwells in the disciples by the Spirit; for, though he is not seen with the bodily eyes, yet his presence is known by the undoubted experience of faith.”³

The problem with choosing either possibility over the other is that the resurrection and the ascension necessarily hang together. Obviously, the ascension is impossible apart from the resurrection, but also the resurrection cannot stand on its own apart from the ascension. Just as the cross is in vain apart from the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:14–19), so the resurrection is in vain apart from the ascension. To understand this, it is helpful to remember the work of the Levitical priests. The priests had not finished their work once they slaughtered the sacrificial animals and burned the sacrifices on the altar, which was in the courtyard outside the tabernacle. Instead, the priests had to bring the blood of the sacrifices *inside* the tabernacle, into the holy places where God dwelt. Usually, they sprinkled the blood of the sacrifices on the veil just outside the holy of holies, and then they

smeared blood on the horns of the altar of incense (Lev. 4:5–7). Once every year, though, the high priest brought the sacrificial blood all the way in to the full presence of God in the holy of holies, sprinkling it on the cover of the ark of the covenant (Lev. 16:14–15). The work of the Levitical priests was not complete until they could bring their priestly work (the sacrificial blood) into the presence of God.

In the same way, Jesus' work was not complete until his ascension. At the ascension, Jesus presented his once-for-all completed sacrifice to the Father by entering into the holy places made without human hands—that is, into heaven itself—as our great High Priest (Heb. 9:23–28). It is probably better, then, to avoid drawing too strong of a contrast between the ways the disciples “see” the resurrected Jesus immediately after his resurrection and then “see” Jesus by faith through the Holy Spirit after the ascension. Instead, what Jesus has been teaching through this entire Upper Room Discourse is that when he returns in triumph to his Father, he will usher in the new ministry of the Holy Spirit (e.g., John 15:26; 16:7–15). Jesus will continue to dwell among his disciples by dwelling *within* them by his Holy Spirit (John 14:17, 23). The resurrection, then, is not the end of the ministry of Jesus to his disciples, but the beginning of a fuller ministry through the Holy Spirit.

It is not surprising, then, that in the garden outside Jesus' vacated tomb, the resurrected Lord tells Mary Magdalene, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father” (John 20:17). Jesus is not discouraging Mary from clinging to him entirely, for she *must* cling to Jesus, but not in such a way as to prevent him from ascending to his Father. When Jesus returns to his Father, the disciples will actually enjoy a better, *clearer* vision of Jesus through the Holy Spirit. William Hendriksen, then, paraphrases the John 16:16 this way:

“A little while—a few more hours!—, and I will be taken away from you, for I will be put to death and buried. Hence, you will observe me no longer. But I will not remain away from you. Rising gloriously on the third day, I will usher in the dispensation of the Spirit. In and by means of the mighty works which he will perform on earth, you will see me.”

When Jesus says that “it is to your advantage that I go away” (John 16:7), he means it. He is not removing himself from the sight of his disciples, but giving them a *truer* view of his glory.

Joy Through Sorrow

Jesus continues, insisting that they will experience great sorrow, but that their sorrow will ultimately turn to joy:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.” (John 16:20–22)

The words “weep” and “lament” are perhaps more powerful in Greek than they come across in English. By the word “weep,” Jesus means that his disciples will “sob, with loud, unrestrained

weeping,” and by “lament,” Jesus means that they will “utter wailing cries and moans for the dead.” In Jewish culture, grieving the loss of the dead was a serious, communal activity (cf. John 11:19, 31), filled with unstrained weeping, lamenting, and wailing. Here, Jesus is using that language to describe the way in which the disciples will grieve and mourn his death.

To add ghastly insult to their bitter injury, Jesus adds that “the world will rejoice” (John 16:20). The crucifixion of Jesus will bring about two very different responses: the disciples will grieve, but the world will gleefully celebrate the riddance of the One who bore witness against their sin. Jesus will be mistreated, falsely accused, and wickedly condemned in the most serious miscarriage of justice the world has ever seen. Jesus is righteous, so he represents a mortal threat to the values, systems, and power structures of the world. The world must extinguish the true Light in order to continue their works of darkness. When the deed is done, with Jesus’ mangled corpse tucked away safely in a tomb, the world will rejoice in the victory of the darkness over the light.

Nevertheless, sorrow for the disciples and joy for the world will not be the permanent result. Jesus says, “You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy” (John 16:20). It is not that the disciples will get over the sting of Jesus’ death and move on with their lives to find fulfillment elsewhere. In other words, “This does not mean that eventually the sorrow of the disciples shall subside and that in spite of their former grief they shall again become joyful; but that their very grief, i.e., the very thing that plunged them into such excessive grief, shall turn into joy, i.e., into a glorious cause of joy.”⁶ The crucifixion will be a cause of rejoicing for the world and sorrow for the disciples, but only for a little while. Afterward, the meaning of the crucifixion will entirely turn around for *both* the disciples and the world. For the disciples, the crucifixion will eventually turn from sorrow to joy, as the disciples more fully grasp the great victory that Jesus wins at the cross. For the world, the crucifixion will turn from joy to shame as the Holy Spirit uses the cross to convict the world concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8–11).

Sorrow and Joy at Childbirth

To illustrate his point, Jesus describes the sorrow of his disciples in terms of a woman giving birth: “When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world” (John 16:21). The power of this metaphor lies in the way that the suffering of childbirth connects directly with the joy of bringing a child into the world. Sometimes we suffer without seeing any fruit come out of our suffering, which leads us to wonder if we suffered for nothing. In the case of childbirth, on the other hand, the fruit of the suffering is obvious when a mother holds her new baby in her arms. In the same way, Jesus is saying that the disciples will ultimately consider that the grievous suffering they endured through watching their Master die on the cross will all be worth it when they see him resurrected from the dead. The cross will bring sorrow, but that sorrow will not be in vain.

The Old Testament employs this metaphor of suffering and joy from childbirth at various points (Is. 21:2–3; 26:16–21; 66:7–14; Jer. 13:21; Mic. 4:9–10).⁷ Jesus distinguishes his promise from the promises of the Old Testament by adding this extra emphasis: “So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, *and no one will take your joy from you*” (John 16:22). The people of God saw many victories during the Old Testament—the deliverance from Egypt (Ex. 12–14), the possession of the Promised Land (Josh. 23–24), the glory of the kingdom during the

reigns of David (2 Sam. 7) and Solomon (1 Kgs. 10), and the return from Babylonian captivity (Ezra 1). In all of these cases, however, something always happened to spoil the joy of God's people. The emancipated Israelites rebelled against God under Moses, causing them to wander in the wilderness for forty years (Num. 14:1–38). The Israelites failed to complete the mission of driving the Canaanites out of the Promised Land, so that God handed them over to their enemies repeatedly during the period of the judges (Judg. 2:1–5). Both David and Solomon grievously sinned against the Lord—the former by adultery, murder, and deception (2 Sam. 11), and the latter by idolatrous worship (1 Kgs. 11:1–8). The Israelites almost immediately intermarried with foreign women after returning from Babylonian captivity (Ezra 9–10). No matter how good any victory during the Old Testament might be, defeat was always lurking right around the corner.

By contrast, Jesus says that *no one* will be able to take away the joy that he will give to his disciples. While the disciples will fail at many points, the victory of Jesus is solid and secure, incapable of corruption or loss. To the present day, we should cling to this precious promise from our Master. John Calvin writes these words:

We ought, I say, to resemble women in labor, on whom the mere sight of the child born produces such an impression, that their pain gives them pain no longer. But as we have received nothing more than the first-fruits, and these in very small measure, we scarcely taste a few drops of that spiritual gladness, to soothe our grief and alleviate its bitterness. And yet that small portion clearly shows that they who contemplate Christ by faith are so far from being at any time overwhelmed by grief, that, amidst their heaviest sufferings, they rejoice with exceeding great joy....To sum up the whole in a few words, believers are like *women in labor*, because, having been born again in Christ, they have not yet entered into the heavenly kingdom of God and a blessed life; and they are like pregnant women who are in childbirth, because, being still held captive in the prison of the flesh, they long for that blessed state which lies hidden under hope.⁸

Though we continue to suffer, Jesus promises us that his victory is so secure that *no one* can take it away from us. In the midst of our darkest hours, we may rejoice as we look upon the true Light who continues to shine. Furthermore, our suffering is worth it, for at the end of it all, we will receive our glorious hope with Christ just as the laboring woman receives her baby.

The Cross Will Remove the Veil (John 16:23–28)

So far, Jesus has largely talked about the new *kind* of relationship that he will enjoy with his people by the Holy Spirit whom he will send. Although Jesus has mentioned the new way that God's people will relate with the Father (John 14:16, 21, 23; 15:1–8, 16), Jesus now becomes much more explicit. Because Jesus goes to the Father, the Father will relate in a new way to those who believe in Jesus:

“In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.” (John 16:23–24)

In this new reality, Jesus explains that the disciples will no longer ask for anything from Jesus specifically, as they have done during Jesus' earthly ministry. Instead, the disciples will directly approach the *Father* to ask for whatever we need.⁹ Furthermore, Jesus urges his disciples to "Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full."

Prayer in Jesus' Name

Nevertheless, Jesus does not remove himself from the picture entirely. Rather, he insists that when we approach the Father, we will do so "in my name" (John 16:23), for "until now you have asked nothing in my name" (John 16:24). The change Jesus is describing is not only that his disciples will approach the Father with their requests in prayer, but also that they will do so in the name of Jesus. Up to this point, Jesus has been the Father's humble, suffering servant. He has not sought position, power, or prestige, but he has embraced an estate of humiliation by taking the place of the lowest slave in the world—an estate that will culminate shortly in the humiliation of the cross that Jesus will endure in obedience to the Father.

Once Jesus triumphantly completes his earthly ministry, though, his role will change. He will no longer exist in an estate of humiliation, but he will take possession of an estate of exaltation.¹⁰ After humbling himself to the point of death on the cross, the Father will now highly exalt Jesus as Lord (Phil. 2:8–11). As a part of the privileges of his exaltation, Jesus will become the Mediator and Advocate through whom we pray to the Father. The death of Jesus caps his estate of humiliation, and his resurrection marks the beginning of his estate of exaltation as our Advocate before the Father. John Calvin writes this:

But here arises a difficult question: Was this the first time that men began to call on God in the name of Christ? For never could God be reconciled to men in any other way than for the sake of the Mediator. Christ describes the future time, when the Heavenly Father will give to the disciples whatever they shall ask in his name. If this be a new and unwonted [that is, *unprecedented*] favor, it would seem that we may infer from it that, so long as Christ dwelt on earth, he did not yet exercise the office of Advocate, that through him the prayers of believers might be acceptable to God.¹¹

Until now God's people asked nothing in the name of Jesus, for Jesus had not yet been revealed, nor had he suffered and died, nor had he been exalted. But now that Jesus' course of earthly ministry is complete, he returns to the right hand of his Father so that we may pray to the Father in Jesus' name.¹²

The Love of the Father

Jesus builds on this foundation of our new ability to *pray* to the Father in Jesus' name:

"I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father. In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from

God.” (John 16:25–27)

All along, Jesus has taught his disciples by using figures of speech—parables, metaphors, and allegories. Jesus employed these figures of speech to teach his disciples the truth while yet keeping hidden the full reality of what he had come to do until after his death and resurrection were complete (cf. John 2:22; 12:16). But at this point, the “hour is coming” when Jesus will rise from the dead so that he will no longer need to speak to his disciples with figures of speech. When that happens, Jesus will speak to them “plainly” about the Father (John 16:25).

When Jesus returns to the Father (“In that day”; John 16:26), Jesus will no longer exclusively speak to the Father on behalf of the disciples. Certainly, Jesus will intercede unceasingly for his people at the Father’s right hand (Heb. 7:25).¹³ But, Jesus’ completed work will open a new kind of access to the Father: “for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God” (John 16:27). Leon Morris writes this:

Asking in Jesus’ name is not a way of enlisting his support. It is rather a pleading of his person and of his work for sinners. It is praying on the basis of all that he is and has done for our salvation.... The Son does not persuade the Father to be gracious. The whole of the work of the Son rests on the loving care of the Father who sent him.¹⁴

We may go to the Father under the banner of Jesus because Jesus has done everything for us to open direct access to the Father in his name. The Father sent the Son to open this way for us to come near to the Father, for the Father loves us.

The way in which we take hold of this access, then, is through loving Jesus and believing that he came from God. This verse echoes what Jesus said earlier: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him” (John 14:6–7). Because the Father puts Jesus forward as his image, we know and love the Father by knowing and loving Jesus. The love of Jesus for the disciples is the love of the *Father* for the disciples, and the accomplishment of Jesus opens the way for us disciples to be reconciled to the Father through Jesus. The reason that the “heavenly treasures” will “be so bountifully opened up to us” is that we will “ask in the name of Christ whatever they need, and God will refuse nothing that shall be asked in the name of his Son.”¹⁵

Removing the Veil

This new access to the Father marks a decisive turning point in salvation history. Only in the garden of Eden did God’s people enjoy free, unrestricted, direct access to God. After the Fall, God placed cherubim with flaming swords to guard the entrance to the way to the tree of life (Gen. 3:24). From that point forward, God’s people were cut off from enjoying direct access to God himself, or to the full abundance of life that God offers to his people. Later, when God dwelt with his people in the tabernacle, the same reality of separation from God was literally woven into the fabric of the tabernacle. Through veils that covered both of the holy places, God separated himself and his holiness from his people. Furthermore, God stationed Levites outside the tabernacle with the same instructions that God had given to the cherubim: “They shall keep guard over him [Aaron the priest] and over the whole congregation before the tent of meeting, as they minister at the tabernacle.... But

if any outsider comes near, he shall be put to death” (Num. 3:7, 10). Just as the cherubim guarded the way back into the garden the Levites guarded the way into the holy of holies.

By grace, God did allow one group of people to enter into the presence of his holiness in his temple: the priests. The priests would take the blood of the sacrifices of the people and bring it inside the veil—most regularly into the holy place, but once per year on the Day of Atonement into the holy of holies. In those holy places, the priest sprinkled the blood of the sacrifices for the atonement of the sins of God’s people, and the priest would offer intercessory prayer in the direct presence of God. That is, the priest—and only the priest—would approach God on behalf of the people. Jesus language here explicitly abolishes that arrangement. He says, “I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God” (John 16:26–27). Certainly, Jesus will plead for us unceasingly as our high priest (Heb. 7:25), but he will not plead for us in the presence of the Father *exclusively*. Rather, Jesus is saying that his priestly mediation will be so perfect that he will remove the veil of separation between us and the Father entirely—indeed, the veil in the temple will tear from top to bottom when Jesus breathes his last (Matt. 27:51). At the cross, Jesus will reconcile us with joy into the presence of the Father.

“I came from the Father”

Jesus then reminds the disciples about the whole purpose of his own coming into the world: “I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father” (John 16:28). Again, it is not as though Jesus had to persuade the Father to love the disciples. The Father himself sent Jesus into the world to accomplish the entirety of what was required for our redemption, and now Jesus is going to return to his Father in triumph after successfully completing the task that the Father gave him. It was *always* the plan for the Father to send the Son into the world, and it was *always* the plan for the Son to return to his Father. Jesus’ return to the Father is in fulfillment of the plan of redemption for God’s people, not a deviation from it. Or, to put it another way, Jesus’ return to the Father is not because of a *lack* of the Father’s love, but an *abundance*. Jesus came into the world because of the Father’s love (John 3:16), and now he must *return* to his Father because of the Father’s love.

The Cross Will Bring Victory over the World (John 16:29–33)

For whatever reason, these last few explanations lead the disciples into some level of understanding:

His disciples said, “Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech! Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you; this is why we believe that you came from God.” (John 16:29–30)

It is difficult to know exactly what the disciples found so instructive, especially since Jesus spoke of his plain speaking about the Father in the future: “I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is *coming* when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father” (John 16:25). Perhaps they truly believe that they understand what Jesus is saying,

or perhaps they are trying to reassure Jesus in these last moments they have with him before his departure, even though they still have no idea what he is trying to tell them.

The Failure of the Disciples

Jesus sees through their words and rebukes them for their lack of faith: “Jesus answered them, ‘Do you now believe? Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me’” (John 16:31–32). This rebuke sounds similar to what Jesus said to Peter when Peter pledged to lay his life down for Jesus (John 13:37). There also, Jesus repeated, and then contradicted, Peter’s words: “Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times” (John 13:38). While the disciples do indeed believe that Jesus has come from God (John 16:30), their faith is not sufficiently strong to withstand Jesus’ coming crucifixion. When Judas leads the mob to betray Jesus, the disciples will fight for a moment (John 16:10), but then they will scatter once Jesus gives himself up (Mark 14:50). Jesus’ words are a warning to any of us who think we are strong in faith. Let the one who thinks he stands take heed, lest he fall (1 Cor. 10:12).¹⁶

Nevertheless, Jesus insists that his Father will not abandon him: “Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me” (John 16:32). Judas will betray him, his disciples will abandon him, the world will condemn him, but the Father is on his side, so Jesus “loses nothing of his dignity.”¹⁷ To the end, Jesus will be misunderstood, despised, hated, and rejected—even by those closest to him—but his sorrows as he approaches the cross will not be in vain. Through everything, Jesus will overcome the world.

The Victory of Jesus

Jesus closes his Upper Room Discourse with one of the most precious promises in the Gospel of John: “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Even though Jesus’ disciples will abandon him, he does not condemn them. In fact, he does not even chew them out or rub their noses in their failure. Instead, Jesus speaks all these words so that they may have *peace* in Jesus, in spite of their coming failures. Jesus reminds them of what he has told them frequently in this Discourse: “In the world you will have tribulation.” The world will hate them as the world hated Jesus (John 15:18–16:4a), which will lead the disciples into deep suffering and tribulation.

Nevertheless, Jesus closes on a note of comfort: “But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). No matter what happens, and no matter what the disciples *think* that the coming events will mean, Jesus interprets his cross for his disciples in advance. Far from the cross signaling the defeat and end of Jesus, the cross will signal his victory. Though the world will rejoice at the cross (John 16:20), the cross will be the means by which Jesus will overcome the world. This confidence is not only for the cowering disciples as they watched their master nailed to the cross, but for us too as we endure the tribulation of the world. John Calvin writes this:

As there is always in us much reason for trembling, he shows that we ought to be confident for this reason, that he has obtained a victory over the world, not for himself individually, but for our sake. Thus, though in ourselves almost overwhelmed, if we contemplate that magnificent glory to which our Head has been exalted, we may boldly despise all the evils which hang over us. If, therefore, we desire to be Christians, we must not seek exemption

from the cross, but must be satisfied with this single consideration, that, fighting under the banner of Christ, we are beyond all danger, even in the midst of the combat.¹⁸

Believer—no matter what evils, troubles, and tribulations you face, Jesus here lifts your eyes up to his glory from his throne in heaven. The world will undoubtedly rage and war against you, just as they did against your Master. Furthermore, you will falter and stumble at many points along the way. But take heart: the world cannot ultimately triumph, and you cannot ultimately fail, for Jesus has already overcome the world through his death and resurrection. Now, he lives to intercede for you (Heb. 7:25), and he summons you to approach the Father directly in his name to ask for anything you need (John 16:23, 26). In this way, Jesus brings forth victorious joy out of the sorrow of the cross.

Discussion Questions

1. Why did the disciples believe that their sorrow at Jesus' departure would be in vain? Would you have felt differently if you had been with them? Is there sorrow in your life that feels like you are suffering in vain? How does the illustration of the sorrow of a laboring woman bringing forth a child bring comfort in the midst of seemingly-fruitless sorrow?
2. Contrast the access to God that the Levitical priests in the old covenant enjoyed versus the access permitted to the common Israelite. Next, contrast the access to God that the Levitical priests enjoyed versus the access permitted to us through the priestly work of Jesus. What affect does our new access to the Father have on our lives—especially in terms of intercessory prayer?
3. What prompted the disciples to boast in John 16:29–30? How did Jesus respond? What confidence can we have before God in the midst of our greatest failures?
4. When Jesus promises that we will certainly have tribulation in the world (John 16:33), what is he talking about? What tribulation have you seen in your own life? Then, what kind of victory has Jesus accomplished when he promises that he has “overcome the world” (John 16:33)? How have you seen his victory in your life? What parts of his victory must you await by faith?

Notes

1. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 537.
2. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 1097–98.
3. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 148. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom35.vi.iii.html>>
4. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 331.
5. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 1095.
6. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel*, 1096.
7. “The combination of intense suffering and relieved joy at childbirth is in the Old Testament a common

illustration of the travail God's people must suffer before the immense relief of the travail God's people must suffer before the immense relief and joy brought about by the advent of the promised messianic salvation (e.g. Is. 21:2–3; 26:16–21; 66:7–14; Je. 13:21; Mi. 4:9–10). Isaiah 26:16–21 is particularly important: it combines the figure of the woman in childbirth, the words 'a little while' and the promise of resurrection." (D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 544.)

8. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 151. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom35.vi.iv.html>>

9. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 545.

10. *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Question 23: "Christ, as our Redeemer, executeth the offices of a prophet, of a priest, and of a king, both in his estate of humiliation and exaltation."

11. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 151. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom35.vi.iv.html>>

12. "Hitherto you have asked nothing in my name. It is probable that the apostles kept the rule of prayer which had been laid down in the Law. Now we know that the fathers were not accustomed to pray without a Mediator; for God had trained them, by so many exercises, to such a form of prayer. They saw the high priest enter into the holy place in the name of the whole people, and they saw sacrifices offered every day, that the prayers of the Church might be acceptable before God. It was, therefore, one of the principles of faith, that prayers offered to God, when there was no Mediator, were rash and useless. Christ had already testified to his disciples plainly enough that he was the Mediator, but their knowledge was so obscure, that they were not yet able to form their prayers in his name in a proper manner.

Nor is there any absurdity in saying that they prayed to God, with confidence in the Mediator, according to the injunction of the Law, and yet did not clearly and fully understand what that meant. The veil of the temple was still stretched out, the majesty of God was concealed under the shadow of the cherubim, the true High Priest had not yet entered into the heavenly sanctuary to intercede for his people, and held not yet consecrated the way by his blood. We need not wonder, therefore, if he was not acknowledged to be the Mediator as he is, now that he appears for us in heaven before the Father, reconciling Him to us by his sacrifice, that we, miserable men, may venture to appear before him with boldness; for truly Christ, after having completed the satisfaction for sin, was received into heaven, and publicly showed himself to be the Mediator." (Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 153–54. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom35.vi.iv.html>>)

13. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 338.

14. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, NICNT, 629–30.

15. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 157. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom35.vi.v.html>>

16. "Do you now believe? As the disciples were too highly pleased with themselves, Christ reminds them that, remembering their weakness, they ought rather to confine themselves within their own little capacity. Now, we never are fully aware of what we want, and of our great distance from the fullness of faith, till we come to some serious trial; for then the fact shows how weak our faith was, which we imagined to be full. Christ recalls the attention of the disciples to this matter, and declares that they will ere long forsake him; for persecution is a touchstone to try faith, and when its smallness becomes evident, they who formerly were swelled with pride begin to tremble and to draw back.

The question put by Christ is therefore ironical; as if he had said, 'Do you boast as if you were full of faith? But the trial is at hand, which will disclose your emptiness.' In this manner we ought to restrain our foolish confidence, when it indulges itself too freely. But it might be thought, either that the disciples had no faith at all, or that it was extinguished, when they had forsaken Christ, and were scattered in all directions. I reply, though their faith was weakened, and had almost given way, still something was left, from which fresh

branches might afterwards shoot forth.” (Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 160–61. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom35.vi.vi.html>>)

17. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 161. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom35.vi.vi.html>>

18. Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. II, 162. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom35.vi.vi.html>>